STEPHEN LEACOCK

FRENZIED FICTION

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Содержание

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I. My Revelations as a Spy

In many people the very name "Spy" excites a shudder of apprehension; we Spies, in fact, get quite used to being shuddered at. None of us Spies mind it at all. Whenever I enter a hotel and register myself as a Spy I am quite accustomed to see a thrill of fear run round the clerks, or clerk, behind the desk.

Us Spies or We Spies—for we call ourselves both—are thus a race apart. None know us. All fear us. Where do we live? Nowhere. Where are we? Everywhere. Frequently we don't know ourselves where we are. The secret orders that we receive come from so high up that it is often forbidden to us even to ask where we are. A friend of mine, or at least a Fellow Spy—us Spies have no friends—one of the most brilliant men in the Hungarian Secret Service, once spent a month in New York under the impression that he was in Winnipeg. If this happened to the most brilliant, think of the others.

All, I say, fear us. Because they know and have reason to know our power. Hence, in spite of the prejudice against us, we are able to move everywhere, to lodge in the best hotels, and enter any society that we wish to penetrate.

Let me relate an incident to illustrate this: a month ago I entered one of the largest of the New York hotels which I will merely call the B. hotel without naming it: to do so might blast it. We Spies, in fact, never *name* a hotel. At the most we indicate it by a number known only to ourselves, such as 1, 2, or 3.

On my presenting myself at the desk the clerk informed me that he had no room vacant. I knew this of course to be a mere subterfuge; whether or not he suspected that I was a Spy I cannot say. I was muffled up, to avoid recognition, in a long overcoat with the collar turned up and reaching well above my ears, while the black beard and the moustache, that I had slipped on in entering the hotel, concealed my face. "Let me speak a moment to the manager," I said. When he came I beckoned him aside and taking his ear in my hand I breathed two words into it. "Good heavens!" he gasped, while his face turned as pale as ashes. "Is it enough?" I asked. "Can I have a room, or must I breathe again?" "No, no," said the manager, still trembling. Then, turning to the clerk: "Give this gentleman a room," he said, "and give him a bath."

What these two words are that will get a room in New York at once I must not divulge. Even now, when the veil of secrecy is being lifted, the international interests involved are too complicated to permit it. Suffice it to say that if these two had failed I know a couple of others still better.

I narrate this incident, otherwise trivial, as indicating the astounding ramifications and the ubiquity of the international

spy system. A similar illustration occurs to me as I write. I was walking the other day with another man, on upper B. way between the T. Building and the W. Garden.

"Do you see that man over there?" I said, pointing from the side of the street on which we were walking on the sidewalk to the other side opposite to the side that we were on.

"The man with the straw hat?" he asked. "Yes, what of him?"

"Oh, nothing," I answered, "except that he's a Spy!"

"Great heavens!" exclaimed my acquaintance, leaning up against a lamp-post for support. "A Spy! How do you know that? What does it mean?"

I gave a quiet laugh—we Spies learn to laugh very quietly.

"Ha!" I said, "that is my secret, my friend. *Verbum sapientius! Che sara sara! Yodel doodle doo!*"

My acquaintance fell in a dead faint upon the street. I watched them take him away in an ambulance. Will the reader be surprised to learn that among the white-coated attendants who removed him I recognized no less a person than the famous Russian Spy, Poulispantzoff. What he was doing there I could not tell. No doubt his orders came from so high up that he himself did not know. I had seen him only twice before—once when we were both disguised as Zulus at Buluwayo, and once in the interior of China, at the time when Poulispantzoff made his secret entry into Thibet concealed in a tea-case. He was inside the tea-case when I saw him; so at least I was informed by the coolies who carried it. Yet I recognized him instantly. Neither he nor I, however, gave

any sign of recognition other than an imperceptible movement of the outer eyelid. (We Spies learn to move the outer lid of the eye so imperceptibly that it cannot be seen.) Yet after meeting Poulispantzoff in this way I was not surprised to read in the evening papers a few hours afterward that the uncle of the young King of Siam had been assassinated. The connection between these two events I am unfortunately not at liberty to explain; the consequences to the Vatican would be too serious. I doubt if it could remain top-side up.

These, however, are but passing incidents in a life filled with danger and excitement. They would have remained unrecorded and unrevealed, like the rest of my revelations, were it not that certain recent events have to some extent removed the seal of secrecy from my lips. The death of a certain royal sovereign makes it possible for me to divulge things hitherto undivulgeable. Even now I can only tell a part, a small part, of the terrific things that I know. When more sovereigns die I can divulge more. I hope to keep on divulging at intervals for years. But I am compelled to be cautious. My relations with the Wilhelmstrasse, with Downing Street and the Quai d'Orsay, are so intimate, and my footing with the Yildiz Kiosk and the Waldorf-Astoria and Childs' Restaurants are so delicate, that a single *faux pas* might prove to be a false step.

It is now seventeen years since I entered the Secret Service of the G. empire. During this time my activities have taken me into every quarter of the globe, at times even into every eighth

or sixteenth of it.

It was I who first brought back word to the Imperial Chancellor of the existence of an Entente between England and France. "Is there an Entente?" he asked me, trembling with excitement, on my arrival at the Wilhelmstrasse. "Your Excellency," I said, "there is." He groaned. "Can you stop it?" he asked. "Don't ask me," I said sadly. "Where must we strike?" demanded the Chancellor. "Fetch me a map," I said. They did so. I placed my finger on the map. "Quick, quick," said the Chancellor, "look where his finger is." They lifted it up. "Morocco!" they cried. I had meant it for Abyssinia but it was too late to change. That night the warship Panther sailed under sealed orders. The rest is history, or at least history and geography.

In the same way it was I who brought word to the Wilhelmstrasse of the *rapprochement* between England and Russia in Persia. "What did you find?" asked the Chancellor as I laid aside the Russian disguise in which I had travelled. "A *Rapprochement!*" I said. He groaned. "They seem to get all the best words," he said.

I shall always feel, to my regret; that I am personally responsible for the outbreak of the present war. It may have had ulterior causes. But there is no doubt that it was precipitated by the fact that, for the first time in seventeen years, I took a six weeks' vacation in June and July of 1914. The consequences of this careless step I ought to have foreseen. Yet I took such precautions as I could. "Do you think," I asked, "that you can

preserve the *status quo* for six weeks, merely six weeks, if I stop spying and take a rest?" "We'll try," they answered. "Remember," I said, as I packed my things, "keep the Dardanelles closed; have the Sandjak of Novi Bazaar properly patrolled, and let the Dobrudja remain under a *modus vivendi* till I come back."

Two months later, while sitting sipping my coffee at a Kurhof in the Schwarzwald, I read in the newspapers that a German army had invaded France and was fighting the French, and that the English expeditionary force had crossed the Channel. "This," I said to myself, "means war." As usual, I was right.

It is needless for me to recount here the life of busy activity that falls to a Spy in wartime. It was necessary for me to be here, there and everywhere, visiting all the best hotels, watering-places, summer resorts, theatres, and places of amusement. It was necessary, moreover, to act with the utmost caution and to assume an air of careless indolence in order to lull suspicion asleep. With this end in view I made a practice of never rising till ten in the morning. I breakfasted with great leisure, and contented myself with passing the morning in a quiet stroll, taking care, however, to keep my ears open. After lunch I generally feigned a light sleep, keeping my ears shut. A *table d'hote* dinner, followed by a visit to the theatre, brought the strenuous day to a close. Few Spies, I venture to say, worked harder than I did.

It was during the third year of the war that I received a peremptory summons from the head of the Imperial Secret

Service at Berlin, Baron Fisch von Gestern. “I want to see you,” it read. Nothing more. In the life of a Spy one learns to think quickly, and to think is to act. I gathered as soon as I received the despatch that for some reason or other Fisch von Gestern was anxious to see me, having, as I instantly inferred, something to say to me. This conjecture proved correct.

The Baron rose at my entrance with military correctness and shook hands.

“Are you willing,” he inquired, “to undertake a mission to America?”

“I am,” I answered.

“Very good. How soon can you start?”

“As soon as I have paid the few bills that I owe in Berlin,” I replied.

“We can hardly wait for that,” said my chief, “and in case it might excite comment. You must start to-night!”

“Very good,” I said.

“Such,” said the Baron, “are the Kaiser’s orders. Here is an American passport and a photograph that will answer the purpose. The likeness is not great, but it is sufficient.”

“But,” I objected, abashed for a moment, “this photograph is of a man with whiskers and I am, unfortunately, clean-shaven.”

“The orders are imperative,” said Gestern, with official hauteur. “You must start to-night. You can grow whiskers this afternoon.”

“Very good,” I replied.

"And now to the business of your mission," continued the Baron. "The United States, as you have perhaps heard, is making war against Germany."

"I have heard so," I replied.

"Yes," continued Gestern. "The fact has leaked out—how, we do not know—and is being widely reported. His Imperial Majesty has decided to stop the war with the United States."

I bowed.

"He intends to send over a secret treaty of the same nature as the one recently made with his recent Highness the recent Czar of Russia. Under this treaty Germany proposes to give to the United States the whole of equatorial Africa and in return the United States is to give to Germany the whole of China. There are other provisions, but I need not trouble you with them. Your mission relates, not to the actual treaty, but to the preparation of the ground."

I bowed again.

"You are aware, I presume," continued the Baron, "that in all high international dealings, at least in Europe, the ground has to be prepared. A hundred threads must be unravelled. This the Imperial Government itself cannot stoop to do. The work must be done by agents like yourself. You understand all this already, no doubt?"

I indicated my assent.

"These, then, are your instructions," said the Baron, speaking slowly and distinctly, as if to impress his words upon my

memory. “On your arrival in the United States you will follow the accredited methods that are known to be used by all the best Spies of the highest diplomacy. You have no doubt read some of the books, almost manuals of instruction, that they have written?”

“I have read many of them,” I said.

“Very well. You will enter, that is to say, enter and move everywhere in the best society. Mark specially, please, that you must not only *enter* it but you must *move*. You must, if I may put it so, get a move on.”

I bowed.

“You must mix freely with the members of the Cabinet. You must dine with them. This is a most necessary matter and one to be kept well in mind. Dine with them often in such a way as to make yourself familiar to them. Will you do this?”

“I will,” I said.

“Very good. Remember also that in order to mask your purpose you must constantly be seen with the most fashionable and most beautiful women of the American capital. Can you do this?”

“Can I?” I said.

“You must if need be”—and the Baron gave a most significant look which was not lost upon me—“carry on an intrigue with one or, better, with several of them. Are you ready for it?”

“More than ready,” I said.

“Very good. But this is only a part. You are expected also

to familiarize yourself with the leaders of the great financial interests. You are to put yourself on such a footing with them as to borrow large sums of money from them. Do you object to this?"

"No," I said frankly, "I do not."

"Good! You will also mingle freely in Ambassadorial and foreign circles. It would be well for you to dine, at least once a week, with the British Ambassador. And now one final word"—here Gestern spoke with singular impressiveness—"as to the President of the United States."

"Yes," I said.

"You must mix with him on a footing of the most open-handed friendliness. Be at the White House continually. Make yourself in the fullest sense of the words the friend and adviser of the President. All this I think is clear. In fact, it is only what is done, as you know, by all the masters of international diplomacy."

"Precisely," I said.

"Very good. And then," continued the Baron, "as soon as you find yourself sufficiently *en rapport* with everybody, or I should say," he added in correction, for the Baron shares fully in the present German horror of imported French words, "when you find yourself sufficiently in enggeknupfterverwandtschaft with everybody, you may then proceed to advance your peace terms. And now, my dear fellow," said the Baron, with a touch of genuine cordiality, "one word more. Are you in need of money?"

"Yes," I said.

"I thought so. But you will find that you need it less and less as you go on. Meantime, good-bye, and best wishes for your mission."

Such was, such is, in fact, the mission with which I am accredited. I regard it as by far the most important mission with which I have been accredited by the Wilhelmstrasse. Yet I am compelled to admit that up to the present it has proved unsuccessful. My attempts to carry it out have been baffled. There is something perhaps in the atmosphere of this republic which obstructs the working of high diplomacy. For over five months now I have been waiting and willing to dine with the American Cabinet. They have not invited me. For four weeks I sat each night waiting in the J. hotel in Washington with my suit on ready to be asked. They did not come near me.

Nor have I yet received an invitation from the British Embassy inviting me to an informal lunch or to midnight supper with the Ambassador. Everybody who knows anything of the inside working of the international spy system will realize that without these invitations one can do nothing. Nor has the President of the United States given any sign. I have sent ward to him, in cipher, that I am ready to dine with him on any day that may be convenient to both of us. He has made no move in the matter.

Under these circumstances an intrigue with any of the leaders of fashionable society has proved impossible. My attempts to approach them have been misunderstood—in fact, have led to my being invited to leave the J. hotel. The fact that I was compelled to

leave it, owing to reasons that I cannot reveal, without paying my account, has occasioned unnecessary and dangerous comment. I connect it, in fact, with the singular attitude adopted by the B. hotel on my arrival in New York, to which I have already referred.

I have therefore been compelled to fall back on revelations and disclosures. Here again I find the American atmosphere singularly uncongenial. I have offered to reveal to the Secretary of State the entire family history of Ferdinand of Bulgaria for fifty dollars. He says it is not worth it. I have offered to the British Embassy the inside story of the Abdication of Constantine for five dollars. They say they know it, and knew it before it happened. I have offered, for little more than a nominal sum, to blacken the character of every reigning family in Germany. I am told that it is not necessary.

Meantime, as it is impossible to return to Central Europe, I expect to open either a fruit store or a peanut stand very shortly in this great metropolis. I imagine that many of my former colleagues will soon be doing the same!

II. Father Knickerbocker: A Fantasy

It happened quite recently—I think it must have been on April the second of 1917—that I was making the long pilgrimage on a day-train from the remote place where I dwell to the city of New York. And as we drew near the city, and day darkened into night, I had fallen to reading from a quaint old copy of Washington Irving's immortal sketches of Father Knickerbocker and of the little town where once he dwelt.

I had picked up the book I know not where. Very old it apparently was and made in England. For there was pasted across the fly-leaf of it an extract from some ancient magazine or journal of a century ago, giving what was evidently a description of the New York of that day.

From reading the book I turned—my head still filled with the vision of Father Knickerbocker and Sleepy Hollow and Tarrytown—to examine the extract. I read it in a sort of half-doze, for the dark had fallen outside, and the drowsy throbbing of the running train attuned one's mind to dreaming of the past.

"The town of New York"—so ran the extract pasted in the little book—"is pleasantly situated at the lower extremity of the Island of Manhattan. Its recent progress has been so amazing that it is now reputed, on good authority, to harbour at least twenty thousand souls. Viewed from the sea, it presents, even at the distance of half a mile, a striking appearance owing to the

number and beauty of its church spires, which rise high above the roofs and foliage and give to the place its characteristically religious aspect. The extreme end of the island is heavily fortified with cannon, commanding a range of a quarter of a mile, and forbidding all access to the harbour. Behind this Battery a neat greensward affords a pleasant promenade, where the citizens are accustomed to walk with their wives every morning after church."

"How I should like to have seen it!" I murmured to myself as I laid the book aside for a moment. "The Battery, the harbour and the citizens walking with their wives, their own wives, on the greensward."

Then I read on:

"From the town itself a wide thoroughfare, the Albany Post Road, runs meandering northward through the fields. It is known for some distance under the name of the Broad Way, and is so wide that four moving vehicles are said to be able to pass abreast. The Broad Way, especially in the springtime when it is redolent with the scent of clover and apple-blossoms, is a favourite evening promenade for the citizens—with their wives—after church. Here they may be seen any evening strolling toward the high ground overlooking the Hudson, their wives on one arm, a spyglass under the other, in order to view what they can see. Down the Broad Way may be seen moving also droves of young lambs with their shepherds, proceeding to the market, while here and there a goat stands quietly munching beside the

road and gazing at the passers-by."

"It seems," I muttered to myself as I read, "in some ways but little changed after all."

"The town"—so the extract continued—"is not without its amusements. A commodious theatre presents with great success every Saturday night the plays of Shakespeare alternating with sacred concerts; the New Yorker, indeed, is celebrated throughout the provinces for his love of amusement and late hours. The theatres do not come out until long after nine o'clock, while for the gayer habitues two excellent restaurants serve fish, macaroni, prunes and other delicacies till long past ten at night. The dress of the New Yorker is correspondingly gay. In the other provinces the men wear nothing but plain suits of a rusty black, whereas in New York there are frequently seen suits of brown, snuff-colour and even of pepper-and-salt. The costumes of the New York women are equally daring, and differ notably from the quiet dress of New England.

"In fine, it is commonly said in the provinces that a New Yorker can be recognized anywhere, with his wife, by their modish costumes, their easy manners and their willingness to spend money—two, three and even five cents being paid for the smallest service."

"Dear me," I thought, as I paused a moment in my reading, "so they had begun it even then."

"The whole spirit of the place"—the account continued—"has recently been admirably embodied in literary form by an

American writer, Mr. Washington Irving (not to be confounded with George Washington). His creation of Father Knickerbocker is so lifelike that it may be said to embody the very spirit of New York. The accompanying woodcut—which was drawn on wood especially for this periodical—recalls at once the delightful figure of Father Knickerbocker. The New Yorkers of to-day are accustomed, indeed, to laugh at Mr. Irving's fancy and to say that Knickerbocker belongs to a day long since past. Yet those who know tell us that the image of the amiable old gentleman, kindly but irascible, generous and yet frugal, loving his town and seeing little beyond it, may be held once and for all to typify the spirit of the place, without reference to any particular time or generation."

"Father Knickerbocker!" I murmured, as I felt myself dozing off to sleep, rocked by the motion of the car. "Father Knickerbocker, how strange if he could be here again and see the great city as we know it now! How different from his day! How I should love to go round New York and show it to him as it is."

So I mused and dozed till the very rumble of the wheels seemed to piece together in little snatches. "Father Knickerbocker—Father Knickerbocker—the Battery—the Battery—citizens walking with their wives, with their wives—their own wives"—until presently, I imagine, I must have fallen asleep altogether and knew no more till my journey was over and I found myself among the roar and bustle of the concourse of the Grand Central.

And there, lo and behold, waiting to meet me, was Father

Knickerbocker himself! I know not how it happened, by what queer freak of hallucination or by what actual miracle—let those explain it who deal in such things—but there he stood before me, with an outstretched hand and a smile of greeting, Father Knickerbocker himself, the Embodied Spirit of New York.

"How strange," I said. "I was just reading about you in a book on the train and imagining how much I should like actually to meet you and to show you round New York."

The old man laughed in a jaunty way.

"Show *me* round?" he said. "Why, my dear boy, *I live here*."

"I know you did long ago," I said.

"I do still," said Father Knickerbocker. "I've never left the place. I'll show *you* around. But wait a bit—don't carry that handbag. I'll get a boy to call a porter to fetch a man to take it."

"Oh, I can carry it," I said. "It's a mere nothing."

"My dear fellow," said Father Knickerbocker, a little testily I thought, "I'm as democratic and as plain and simple as any man in this city. But when it comes to carrying a handbag in full sight of all this crowd, why, as I said to Peter Stuyvesant about—about"—here a misty look seemed to come over the old gentleman's face—"about two hundred years ago, I'll be hanged if I will. It can't be done. It's not up to date."

While he was saying this, Father Knickerbocker had beckoned to a group of porters.

"Take this gentleman's handbag," he said, "and you carry his newspapers, and you take his umbrella. Here's a quarter for you

and a quarter for you and a quarter for you. One of you go in front and lead the way to a taxi."

"Don't you know the way yourself?" I asked in a half-whisper.

"Of course I do, but I generally like to walk with a boy in front of me. We all do. Only the cheap people nowadays find their own way."

Father Knickerbocker had taken my arm and was walking along in a queer, excited fashion, senile and yet with a sort of forced youthfulness in his gait and manner.

"Now then," he said, "get into this taxi."

"Can't we *walk*?" I asked.

"Impossible," said the old gentleman. "It's five blocks to where we are going."

As we took our seats I looked again at my companion; this time more closely. Father Knickerbocker he certainly was, yet somehow strangely transformed from my pictured fancy of the Sleepy Hollow days. His antique coat with its wide skirt had, it seemed, assumed a modish cut as if in imitation of the bell-shaped spring overcoat of the young man about town. His three-cornered hat was set at a rakish angle till it looked almost like an up-to-date fedora. The great stick that he used to carry had somehow changed itself into the curved walking-stick of a Broadway lounger. The solid old shoes with their wide buckles were gone. In their place he wore narrow slippers of patent leather of which he seemed inordinately proud, for he had stuck his feet up ostentatiously on the seat opposite. His eyes followed

my glance toward his shoes.

"For the fox-trot," he said. "The old ones were no good. Have a cigarette? These are Armenian, or would you prefer a Honolulan or a Nigerian? Now," he resumed, when we had lighted our cigarettes, "what would you like to do first? Dance the tango? Hear some Hawaiian music, drink cocktails, or what?"

"Why, what I should like most of all, Father Knickerbocker —"

But he interrupted me.

"There's a devilish fine woman! Look, the tall blonde one! Give me blondes every time!" Here he smacked his lips. "By gad, sir, the women in this town seem to get finer every century. What were you saying?"

"Why, Father Knickerbocker," I began, but he interrupted me again.

"My dear fellow," he said. "May I ask you not to call me *Father* Knickerbocker?"

"But I thought you were so old," I said humbly.

"Old! Me *old*! Oh, I don't know. Why, dash it, there are plenty of men as old as I am dancing the tango here every night. Pray call me, if you don't mind, just Knickerbocker, or simply Knicky —most of the other boys call me Knicky. Now what's it to be?"

"Most of all," I said, "I should like to go to some quiet place and have a talk about the old days."

"Right," he said. "We're going to just the place now—nice quiet dinner, a good quiet orchestra, Hawaiian, but quiet, and

lots of women." Here he smacked his lips again, and nudged me with his elbow. "Lots of women, bunches of them. Do you like women?"

"Why, Mr. Knickerbocker," I said hesitatingly, "I suppose—I—"

The old man sniggered as he poked me again in the ribs.

"You bet you do, you dog!" he chuckled. "We *all* do. For me, I confess it, sir, I can't sit down to dinner without plenty of women, stacks of them, all round me."

Meantime the taxi had stopped. I was about to open the door and get out.

"Wait, wait," said Father Knickerbocker, his hand upon my arm, as he looked out of the window. "I'll see somebody in a minute who'll let us out for fifty cents. None of us here ever gets in or out of anything by ourselves. It's bad form. Ah, here he is!"

A moment later we had passed through the portals of a great restaurant, and found ourselves surrounded with all the colour and tumult of a New York dinner *a la mode*. A burst of wild music, pounded and thrummed out on ukuleles by a group of yellow men in Hawaiian costume, filled the room, helping to drown or perhaps only serving to accentuate the babel of talk and the clatter of dishes that arose on every side. Men in evening dress and women in all the colours of the rainbow, *decollete* to a degree, were seated at little tables, blowing blue smoke into the air, and drinking green and yellow drinks from glasses with thin stems. A troupe of *cabaret* performers shouted and leaped on a

little stage at the side of the room, unheeded by the crowd.

"Ha ha!" said Knickerbocker, as we drew in our chairs to a table. "Some place, eh? There's a peach! Look at her! Or do you like better that lazy-looking brunette next to her?"

Mr. Knickerbocker was staring about the room, gazing at the women with open effrontery, and a senile leer upon his face. I felt ashamed of him. Yet, oddly enough, no one about us seemed in the least disturbed.

"Now, what cocktail will you have?" said my companion. "There's a new one this week, the Fantan, fifty cents each, will you have that? Right? Two Fantans. Now to eat—what would you like?"

"May I have a slice of cold beef and a pint of ale?"

"Beef!" said Knickerbocker contemptuously. "My dear fellow, you can't have that. Beef is only fifty cents. Do take something reasonable. Try Lobster Newburg, or no, here's a more expensive thing—Filet Bourbon a la something. I don't know what it is, but by gad, sir, it's three dollars a portion anyway."

"All right," I said. "You order the dinner."

Mr. Knickerbocker proceeded to do so, the head-waiter obsequiously at his side, and his long finger indicating on the menu everything that seemed most expensive and that carried the most incomprehensible name. When he had finished he turned to me again.

"Now," he said, "let's talk."

"Tell me," I said, "about the old days and the old times on Broadway."

"Ah, yes," he answered, "the old days—you mean ten years ago before the Winter Garden was opened. We've been going ahead, sir, going ahead. Why, ten years ago there was practically nothing, sir, above Times Square, and look at it now."

I began to realize that Father Knickerbocker, old as he was, had forgotten all the earlier times with which I associated his memory. There was nothing left but the *cabarets*, and the Gardens, the Palm Rooms, and the ukuleles of to-day. Behind that his mind refused to travel.

"Don't you remember," I asked, "the apple orchards and the quiet groves of trees that used to line Broadway long ago?"

"Groves!" he said. "I'll show you a grove, a coconut grove"—here he winked over his wineglass in a senile fashion—"that has apple-trees beaten from here to Honolulu." Thus he babbled on.

All through our meal his talk continued: of *cabarets* and dances, or fox-trots and midnight suppers, of blondes and brunettes, "peaches" and "dreams," and all the while his eye roved incessantly among the tables, resting on the women with a bold stare. At times he would indicate and point out for me some of what he called the "representative people" present.

"Notice that man at the second table," he would whisper across to me. "He's worth all the way to ten millions: made it in Government contracts; they tried to send him to the penitentiary last fall but they can't get him—he's too smart for them! I'll

introduce you to him presently. See the man with him? That's his lawyer, biggest crook in America, they say; we'll meet him after dinner." Then he would suddenly break off and exclaim: "Egad, sir, there's a fine bunch of them," as another bevy of girls came trooping out upon the stage.

"I wonder," I murmured, "if there is nothing left of him but this? Has all the fine old spirit gone? Is it all drowned out in wine and suffocated in the foul atmosphere of luxury?"

Then suddenly I looked up at my companion, and I saw to my surprise that his whole face and manner had altered. His hand was clenched tight on the edge of the table. His eyes looked before him—through and beyond the riotous crowd all about him—into vacancy, into the far past, back into memories that I thought forgotten. His face had altered. The senile, leering look was gone, and in its place the firm-set face of the Knickerbocker of a century ago.

He was speaking in a strange voice, deep and strong.

"Listen," he said, "listen. Do you hear it—there—far out at sea—ships' guns—listen—they're calling for help—ships' guns —far out at sea!" He had clasped me by the arm. "Quick, to the Battery, they'll need every man to-night, they'll—"

Then he sank back into his chair. His look changed again. The vision died out of his eyes.

"What was I saying?" he asked. "Ah, yes, this old brandy, a very special brand. They keep it for me here, a dollar a glass. They know me here," he added in his fatuous way. "All the

waiters know me. The headwaiter always knows me the minute I come into the room—keeps a chair for me. Now try this brandy and then presently we'll move on and see what's doing at some of the shows."

But somehow, in spite of himself, my companion seemed to be unable to bring himself fully back into the consciousness of the scene before him. The far-away look still lingered in his eyes.

Presently he turned and spoke to me in a low, confidential tone.

"Was I talking to myself a moment ago?" he asked. "Yes? Ah, I feared I was. Do you know—I don't mind telling it to you—lately I've had a strange, queer feeling that comes over me at times, as if *something were happening*—something, I don't know what. I suppose," he continued, with a false attempt at resuming his fatuous manner, "I'm going the pace a little too hard, eh! Makes one fanciful. But the fact is, at times"—he spoke gravely again—"I feel as if there were something happening, something coming."

"Knickerbocker," I said earnestly, "Father Knickerbocker, don't you know that something *is* happening, that this very evening as we are sitting here in all this riot, the President of the United States is to come before Congress on the most solemn mission that ever—"

But my speech fell unheeded. Knickerbocker had picked up his glass again and was leering over it at a bevy of girls dancing upon the stage.

"Look at that girl," he interrupted quickly, "the one dancing at the end. What do you think of her, eh? Some peach!"

Knickerbocker broke off suddenly. For at this moment our ears caught the sound of a noise, a distant tumult, as it were, far down the street and growing nearer. The old man had drawn himself erect in his seat, his hand to his ear, listening as he caught the sound.

"Out on the Broad Way," he said, instinctively calling it by its ancient name as if a flood of memories were upon him. "Do you hear it? Listen—listen—what is it? I've heard that sound before—I've heard every sound on the Broad Way these two centuries back—what is it? I seem to know it!"

The sound and tumult as of running feet and of many voices crying came louder from the street. The people at the tables had turned in their seats to listen. The music of the orchestra had stopped. The waiters had thrown back the heavy curtains from the windows and the people were crowding to them to look out into the street. Knickerbocker had risen in his place, his eyes looked toward the windows, but his gaze was fixed on vacancy as with one who sees a vision passing.

"I know the sound," he cried. "I see it all again. Look, can't you see them? It's Massachusetts soldiers marching South to the war—can't you hear the beating of the drums and the shrill calling of the fife—the regiments from the North, the first to come. I saw them pass, here where we are sitting, sixty years ago—"

Knickerbocker paused a moment, his hand still extended in

the air, and then with a great light upon his face he cried:

"I know it now! I know what it meant, the feeling that has haunted me—the sounds I kept hearing—the guns of the ships at sea and the voices calling in distress! I know now. It means, sir, it means—"

But as he spoke a great cry came up from the street and burst in at the doors and windows, echoing in a single word:

WAR! WAR! The message of the President is for WAR!

"War!" cried Father Knickerbocker, rising to his full height, stern and majestic and shouting in a stentorian tone that echoed through the great room. "War! War! To your places, every one of you! Be done with your idle luxury! Out with the glare of your lights! Begone you painted women and worthless men! To your places every man of you! To the Battery! Man the guns! Stand to it, every one of you for the defence of America—for our New York, New York—"

Then, with the sound "New York, New York" still echoing in my ears I woke up. The vision of my dream was gone. I was still on the seat of the car where I had dozed asleep, the book upon my knee. The train had arrived at the depot and the porters were calling into the doorway of the car: "New York! New York!"

All about me was the stir and hubbub of the great depot. But loud over all it was heard the call of the newsboys crying "WAR! WAR! The President's message is for WAR! Late extra! WAR! WAR!"

And I knew that a great nation had cast aside the bonds of

sloth and luxury, and was girding itself to join in the fight for the free democracy of all mankind.

III. The Prophet in Our Midst

The Eminent Authority looked around at the little group of us seated about him at the club. He was telling us, or beginning to tell us, about the outcome of the war. It was a thing we wanted to know. We were listening attentively. We felt that we were "getting something."

"I doubt very much," he said, "whether Downing Street realizes the enormous power which the Quai d'Orsay has over the Yildiz Kiosk."

"So do I," I said, "what is it?"

But he hardly noticed the interruption.

"You've got to remember," he went on, "that, from the point of view of the Yildiz, the Wilhelmstrasse is just a thing of yesterday."

"Quite so," I said.

"Of course," he added, "the Ballplatz is quite different."

"Altogether different," I admitted.

"And mind you," he said, "the Ballplatz itself can be largely moved from the Quirinal through the Vatican."

"Why of course it can," I agreed, with as much relief in my tone as I could put into it. After all, what simpler way of moving the Ballplatz than that?

The Eminent Authority took another sip at his tea, and looked round at us through his spectacles.

It was I who was taking on myself to do most of the answering, because it was I who had brought him there and invited the other men to meet him. "He's coming round at five," I had said, "do come and have a cup of tea and meet him. He knows more about the European situation and the probable solution than any other man living." Naturally they came gladly. They wanted to know—as everybody wants to know—how the war will end. They were just ordinary plain men like myself.

I could see that they were a little mystified, perhaps disappointed. They would have liked, just as I would, to ask a few plain questions, such as, can the Italians knock the stuff out of the Austrians? Are the Rumanians getting licked or not? How many submarines has Germany got, anyway? Such questions, in fact, as we are accustomed to put up to one another every day at lunch and to answer out of the morning paper. As it was, we didn't seem to be getting anywhere.

No one spoke. The silence began to be even a little uncomfortable. It was broken by my friend Rapley, who is in wholesale hardware and who has all the intellectual bravery that goes with it. He asked the Authority straight out the question that we all wanted to put.

"Just what do you mean by the Ballplatz? What is the Ballplatz?"

The Authority smiled an engaging smile.

"Precisely," he said, "I see your drift exactly. You say what *is* the Ballplatz? I reply quite frankly that it is almost impossible to

answer. Probably one could best define it as the driving power behind the Ausgleich."

"I see," said Rapley.

"Though the plain fact is that ever since the Herzegovinian embroglio the Ballplatz is little more than a counterpoise to the Wilhelmstrasse."

"Ah!" said Rapley.

"Indeed, as everybody knows, the whole relationship of the Ballplatz with the Nevski Prospekt has emanated from the Wilhelmstrasse."

This was a thing which personally I had *not* known. But I said nothing. Neither did the other men. They continued smoking, looking as innocent as they could.

"Don't misunderstand me," said the Authority, "when I speak of the Nevski Prospekt. I am not referring in any way to the Tsarskoe Selo."

"No, no," we all agreed.

"No doubt there were, as we see it plainly now, under currents in all directions from the Tsarskoe Selo."

We all seemed to suggest by our attitude that these undercurrents were sucking at our very feet.

"But the Tsarskoe Selo," said the Authority, "is now definitely eliminated."

We were glad of that; we shifted our feet back into attitudes of ease.

I felt that it was time to ask a leading question.

"Do you think," I said, "that Germany will be broken up by the war?"

"You mean Germany in what sense? Are you thinking of Preuszenthum? Are you referring to Junkerismus?"

"No," I said, quite truthfully, "neither of them."

"Ah," said the Authority, "I see; you mean Germany as a Souverantat embodied in a Reichsland."

"That's it," I said.

"Then it's rather hard," said the Eminent Authority, "to answer your question in plain terms. But I'll try. One thing, of course, is *absolutely* certain, Mittel-Europa goes overboard."

"It does, eh?"

"Oh, yes, absolutely. This is the end of Mittel-Europa. I mean to say—here we've had Mittel-Europa, that is, the Mittel-Europa *idea*, as a sort of fantasmus in front of Teutonism ever since Koniggratz."

The Authority looked all round us in that searching way he had. We all tried to look like men seeing a fantasmus and disgusted at it.

"So you see," he went on, "Mittel-Europa is done with."

"I suppose it is," I said. I didn't know just whether to speak with regret or not. I heard Rapley murmur, "I guess so."

"And there is not a doubt," continued the Authority, "that when Mittel-Europa goes, Grossdeutschthum goes with it."

"Oh, sure to," we all murmured.

"Well, then, there you are—what is the result for Germany—

why the thing's as plain as a pikestaff—in fact you're driven to it by the sheer logic of the situation—there is only *one* outcome—"

The Authority was speaking very deliberately. He even paused at this point and lighted a cigarette, while we all listened breathlessly. We felt that we had got the thing to a focus at last.

"Only one outcome—a Staatenbund."

"Great heavens," I said, "not a Staatenbund!"

"Undoubtedly," said the Authority, puffing quietly at his cigarette, as if personally he wouldn't lift a finger to stop the Staatenbund if he could, "that's the end of it, a Staatenbund. In other words, we are back where we were before the Vienna Congress!"

At this he chuckled heartily to himself: so the rest of us laughed too: the thing was *too* absurd. But the Authority, who was a man of nice distinctions and genuinely anxious to instruct us, was evidently afraid that he had overstated things a little.

"Mind you," he said, "there'll be *something* left—certainly the Zollverein and either the Ausgleich or something very like it."

All of the men gave a sort of sigh of relief. It was certainly something to have at least a sort of resemblance or appearance of the Ausgleich among us. We felt that we were getting on. One could see that a number of the men were on the brink of asking questions.

"What about Rumania," asked Nelles—he is a banker and interested in government bonds—"is this the end of it?"

"No," said the Authority, "it's not the end of Rumania, but it

is the end of Rumanian Irridentismus."

That settled Nelles.

"What about the Turks?" asked Rapley.

"The Turks, or rather, I suppose it would be more proper to say, the Osmanli, as that is no doubt what you mean?" Rapley nodded. "Well, speaking personally, I should say that there's no difficulty in a permanent settlement in that quarter. If I were drawing up the terms of a treaty of peace meant to be really lasting I should lay down three absolute bases; the rest needn't matter"—the Authority paused a moment and then proceeded to count off the three conditions of peace on his fingers—"These would be, first, the evacuation of the Sandjak; second, an international guarantee for the Capitulations; and third, for internal matters, an arrangement along the lines of the original firman of Midhat Pasha."

A murmur of complete satisfaction went round the group.

"I don't say," continued the Eminent Authority, "that there wouldn't be other minor matters to adjust; but they would be a mere detail. You ask me, for instance, for a *milice*, or at least a gendarmerie, in the Albanian hinterland; very good, I grant it you at once. You retain, if you like, you abolish the Cypriotic suzerainty of the Porte—all right. These are matters of indifference."

We all assumed a look of utter indifference.

"But what about the Dardanelles? Would you have them fixed so that ships could go through, or not?" asked Rapley.

He is a plain man, not easily put down and liking a plain answer. He got it.

"The Dardanelles," said the Authority, "could easily be denationalized under a quadrilateral guarantee to be made a pars materia of the pactum foederis."

"That ought to hold them," I murmured.

The Authority felt now that he had pretty well settled the map of Europe. He rose and shook hands with us all around very cordially. We did not try to detain him. We felt that time like his was too valuable to be wasted on things like us.

"Well, I tell you," said Rapley, as we settled back into our chairs when the Great Authority had gone, "my own opinion, boys, is that the United States and England can trim Germany and Austria any day in the week and twice on Sunday."

After which somebody else said:

"I wonder how many of these submarines Germany has, anyway?"

And then we drifted back into the humbler kind of war talk that we have been carrying on for three years.

But later, as we walked home together, Rapley said to me:

"That fellow threw a lot of light on things in Europe, didn't he?"

And I answered:

"Yes."

What liars we all are!

IV. Personal Adventures in the Spirit World

I do not write what follows with the expectation of convincing or converting anybody. We Spiritualists, or Spiritists—we call ourselves both, or either—never ask anybody to believe us. If they do, well and good. If not, all right. Our attitude simply is that facts are facts. There they are; believe them or not as you like. As I said the other night, in conversation with Aristotle and John Bunyan and George Washington and a few others, why should anybody believe us? Aristotle, I recollect, said that all that he wished was that everybody should know how happy he was; and Washington said that for his part, if people only knew how bright and beautiful it all was where he was, they would willingly, indeed gladly, pay the mere dollar—itself only a nominal fee—that it cost to talk to him. Bunyan, I remember, added that he himself was quite happy.

But, as I say, I never ask anybody to believe me; the more so as I was once an absolute sceptic myself. As I see it now, I was prejudiced. The mere fact that spiritual seances and the services of a medium involved the payment of money condemned the whole thing in my eyes. I did not realize, as I do now, that these *medii*, like anybody else, have got to live; otherwise they would die and become spirits.

Nor would I now place these disclosures before the public eyes were if not that I think that in the present crisis they will prove of value to the Allied cause.

But let me begin at the beginning. My own conversion to spiritualism came about, like that of so many others, through the more or less casual remark of a Friend.

Noticing me one day gloomy and depressed, this Friend remarked to me:

"Have you any belief in Spiritualism?"

Had it come from anyone else, I should have turned the question aside with a sneer. But it so happens that I owe a great deal of gratitude to this particular Friend. It was he who, at a time when I was so afflicted with rheumatism that I could scarcely leap five feet into the air without pain, said to me one day quite casually: "Have you ever tried pyro for your rheumatism?" One month later I could leap ten feet in the air—had I been able to—without the slightest malaise. The same man, I may add, hearing me one day exclaiming to myself: "Oh, if there were anything that would remove the stains from my clothes!" said to me very simply and quietly: "Have you ever washed them in luxo?" It was he, too, who, noticing a haggard look on my face after breakfast one morning, inquired immediately what I had been eating for breakfast; after which, with a simplicity and directness which I shall never forget, he said: "Why not eat humpo?"

Nor can I ever forget my feeling on another occasion when, hearing me exclaim aloud: "Oh, if there were only something

invented for removing the proteins and amygdaloids from a carbonized diet and leaving only the pure nitrogenous life-giving elements!" seized my hand in his, and said in a voice thrilled with emotion: "There is! It has!"

The reader will understand, therefore, that a question, or query, from such a Friend was not to be put lightly aside. When he asked if I believed in Spiritualism I answered with perfect courtesy:

"To be quite frank, I do not."

There was silence between us for a time, and then my Friend said:

"Have you ever given it a trial?"

I paused a moment, as the idea was a novel one.

"No," I answered, "to be quite candid, I have not."

Neither of us spoke for perhaps twenty minutes after this, when my Friend said:

"Have you anything against it?"

I thought awhile and then I said:

"Yes, I have."

My Friend remained silent for perhaps half an hour. Then he asked:

"What?"

I meditated for some time. Then I said:

"This—it seems to me that the whole thing is done for money. How utterly unnatural it is to call up the dead—one's great-grandfather, let us say—and pay money for talking to him."

"Precisely," said my Friend without a moment's pause. "I thought so. Now suppose I could bring you into contact with the spirit world through a medium, or through different *medii*, without there being any question of money, other than a merely nominal fee, the money being, as it were, left out of count, and regarded as only, so to speak, nominal, something given merely *pro forma* and *ad interim*. Under these circumstances, will you try the experiment?"

I rose and took my Friend's hand.

"My dear fellow," I said, "I not only will, but I shall."

From this conversation dated my connection with Spiritualism, which has since opened for me a new world.

It would be out of place for me to indicate the particular address or the particular methods employed by the agency to which my Friend introduced me. I am anxious to avoid anything approaching a commercial tinge in what I write. Moreover, their advertisement can be seen along with many others—all, I am sure, just as honourable and just as trustworthy—in the columns of any daily newspaper. As everybody knows, many methods are employed. The tapping of a table, the movement of a ouija board, or the voice of a trance medium, are only a few among the many devices by which the spirits now enter into communication with us. But in my own case the method used was not only simplicity itself, but was so framed as to carry with it the proof of its own genuineness. One had merely to speak into the receiver of a telephone, and the voice of the spirit was heard through the

transmitter as in an ordinary telephone conversation.

It was only natural, after the scoffing remark that I had made, that I should begin with my great-grandfather. Nor can I ever forget the peculiar thrill that went through me when I was informed by the head of the agency that a tracer was being sent out for Great-grandfather to call him to the phone.

Great-grandfather—let me do him this justice—was prompt. He was there in three minutes. Whatever his line of business was in the spirit world—and I was never able to learn it—he must have left it immediately and hurried to the telephone. Whatever later dissatisfaction I may have had with Great-grandfather, let me state it fairly and honestly, he is at least a punctual man. Every time I called he came right away without delay. Let those who are inclined to cavil at the methods of the Spiritualists reflect how impossible it would be to secure such punctuality on anything but a basis of absolute honesty.

In my first conversation with Great-grandfather, I found myself so absurdly nervous at the thought of the vast gulf of space and time across which we were speaking that I perhaps framed my questions somewhat too crudely.

"How are you, great-grandfather?" I asked.

His voice came back to me as distinctly as if he were in the next room:

"I am happy, very happy. Please tell everybody that I am *happy*."

"Great-grandfather," I said. "I will. I'll see that everybody

knows it. Where are you, great-grandfather?"

"Here," he answered, "beyond."

"Beyond what?"

"Here on the other side."

"Side of which?" I asked.

"Of the great vastness," he answered. "The other end of the Illimitable."

"Oh, I see," I said, "that's where you are."

We were silent for some time. It is amazing how difficult it is to find things to talk about with one's great-grandfather. For the life of me I could think of nothing better than:

"What sort of weather have you been having?"

"There is no weather here," said Great-grandfather. "It's all bright and beautiful all the time."

"You mean bright sunshine?" I said.

"There is no sun here," said Great-grandfather.

"Then how do you mean—" I began.

But at this moment the head of the agency tapped me on the shoulder to remind me that the two minutes' conversation for which I had deposited, as a nominal fee, five dollars, had expired. The agency was courteous enough to inform me that for five dollars more Great-grandfather would talk another two minutes.

But I thought it preferable to stop for the moment.

Now I do not wish to say a word against my own great-grandfather. Yet in the conversations which followed on successive days I found him—how shall I put it?—unsatisfactory.

He had been, when on this side—to use the term we Spiritualists prefer—a singularly able man, an English judge; so at least I have always been given to understand. But somehow Great-grandfather's brain, on the other side, seemed to have got badly damaged. My own theory is that, living always in the bright sunshine, he had got sunstroke. But I may wrong him. Perhaps it was locomotor ataxy that he had. That he was very, very happy where he was is beyond all doubt. He said so at every conversation. But I have noticed that feeble-minded people are often happy. He said, too, that he was glad to be where he was; and on the whole I felt glad that he was too. Once or twice I thought that possibly Great-grandfather felt so happy because he had been drinking: his voice, even across the great gulf, seemed somehow to suggest it. But on being questioned he told me that where he was there was no drink and no thirst, because it was all so bright and beautiful. I asked him if he meant that it was "bone-dry" like Kansas, or whether the rich could still get it? But he didn't answer.

Our intercourse ended in a quarrel. No doubt it was my fault. But it *did* seem to me that Great-grandfather, who had been one of the greatest English lawyers of his day, might have handed out an opinion.

The matter came up thus: I had had an argument—it was in the middle of last winter—with some men at my club about the legal interpretation of the Adamson Law. The dispute grew bitter.

"I'm right," I said, "and I'll prove it if you give me time to

consult the authorities."

"Consult your great-grandfather!" sneered one of the men.

"All right," I said, "I will."

I walked straight across the room to the telephone and called up the agency.

"Give me my great-grandfather," I said. "I want him right away."

He was there. Good, punctual old soul, I'll say that for him. He was there.

"Great-grandfather," I said, "I'm in a discussion here about the constitutionality of the Adamson Law, involving the power of Congress under the Constitution. Now, you remember the Constitution when they made it. Is the law all right?"

There was silence.

"How does it stand, great-grandfather?" I said. "Will it hold water?"

Then he spoke.

"Over here," he said, "there are no laws, no members of Congress and no Adamsons; it's all bright and beautiful and—"

"Great-grandfather," I said, as I hung up the receiver in disgust, "you are a Mutt!"

I never spoke to him again. Yet I feel sorry for him, feeble old soul, flitting about in the Illimitable, and always so punctual to hurry to the telephone, so happy, so feeble-witted and courteous; a better man, perhaps, take it all in all, than he was in life; lonely, too, it may be, out there in the Vastness. Yet I never called him

up again. He is happy. Let him stay.

Indeed, my acquaintance with the spirit world might have ended at that point but for the good offices, once more, of my Friend.

"You find your great-grandfather a little slow, a little dull?" he said. "Well, then, if you want brains, power, energy, why not call up some of the spirits of the great men, some of the leading men, for instance, of your great-grandfather's time?"

"You've said it!" I exclaimed. "I'll call up Napoleon Bonaparte."

I hurried to the agency.

"Is it possible," I asked, "for me to call up the Emperor Napoleon and talk to him?"

Possible? Certainly. It appeared that nothing was easier. In the case of Napoleon Bonaparte the nominal fee had to be ten dollars in place of five; but it seemed to me that, if Great-grandfather cost five, Napoleon Bonaparte at ten was cheapness itself.

"Will it take long to get him?" I asked anxiously.

"We'll send out a tracer for him right away," they said.

Like Great-grandfather, Napoleon was punctual. That I will say for him. If in any way I think less of Napoleon Bonaparte now than I did, let me at least admit that a more punctual, obliging, willing man I never talked with.

He came in two minutes.

"He's on the line now," they said.

I took up the receiver, trembling.

"Hello!" I called. "Est-ce que c'est l'Empereur Napoleon a qui j'ai l'honneur de parler?"

"How's that?" said Napoleon.

"Je demande si je suis en communication avec l'Empereur Napoleon—"

"Oh," said Napoleon, "that's all right; speak English."

"What!" I said in surprise. "You know English? I always thought you couldn't speak a word of it."

He was silent for a minute. Then he said:

"I picked it up over here. It's all right. Go right ahead."

"Well," I continued, "I've always admired you so much, your wonderful brain and genius, that I felt I wanted to speak to you and ask you how you are."

"Happy," said Napoleon, "very happy."

"That's good," I said. "That's fine! And how is it out there? All bright and beautiful, eh?"

"Very beautiful," said the Emperor.

"And just where are you?" I continued. "Somewhere out in the Unspeakable, I suppose, eh?"

"Yes," he answered, "out here beyond."

"That's good," I said. "Pretty happy, eh?"

"Very happy," said Napoleon. "Tell everybody how happy I am."

"I know," I answered. "I'll tell them all. But just now I've a particular thing to ask. We've got a big war on, pretty well the whole world in it, and I thought perhaps a few pointers from a

man like you—"

But at this point the attendant touched me on the shoulder. "Your time is up," he said.

I was about to offer to pay at once for two minutes more when a better idea struck me. Talk with Napoleon? I'd do better than that. I'd call a whole War Council of great spirits, lay the war crisis before them and get the biggest brains that the world ever produced to work on how to win the war.

Who should I have? Let me see! Napoleon himself, of course. I'd bring him back. And for the sea business, the submarine problem, I'd have Nelson. George Washington, naturally, for the American end; for politics, say, good old Ben Franklin, the wisest old head that ever walked on American legs, and witty too; yes, Franklin certainly, if only for his wit to keep the council from getting gloomy; Lincoln—honest old Abe—him certainly I must have. Those and perhaps a few others.

I reckoned that a consultation at ten dollars apiece with spirits of that class was cheap to the verge of the ludicrous. Their advice ought to be worth millions—yes, billions—to the cause.

The agency got them for me without trouble. There is no doubt they are a punctual crowd, over there beyond in the Unthinkable.

I gathered them all in and talked to them, all and severally, the payment, a merely nominal matter, being made, *pro forma*, in advance.

I have in front of me in my rough notes the result of their advice. When properly drafted it will be, I feel sure, one of the

most important state documents produced in the war.

In the personal sense—I have to admit it—I found them just a trifle disappointing. Franklin, poor fellow, has apparently lost his wit. The spirit of Lincoln seemed to me to have none of that homely wisdom that he used to have. And it appears that we were quite mistaken in thinking Disraeli a brilliant man; it is clear to me now that he was dull—just about as dull as Great-grandfather, I should say. Washington, too, is not at all the kind of man we thought him.

Still, these are only personal impressions. They detract nothing from the extraordinary value of the advice given, which seems to me to settle once and for ever any lingering doubt about the value of communications with the Other Side.

My draft of their advice runs in part as follows:

The Spirit of Nelson, on being questioned on the submarine problem, holds that if all the men on the submarines were where he is everything would be bright and happy. This seems to me an invaluable hint. There is nothing needed now except to put them there.

The advice of the Spirit of Napoleon about the campaign on land seemed to me, if possible, of lower value than that of Nelson on the campaign at sea. It is hardly conceivable that Napoleon has forgotten where the Marne is. But it may have changed since his day. At any rate, he says that, if ever the Russians cross the Marne, all is over. Coming from such a master-strategist, this ought to be attended to.

Franklin, on being asked whether the United States had done right in going into the war, said "Yes"; asked whether the country could with honour have stayed out, he said "No." There is guidance here for thinking men of all ranks.

Lincoln is very happy where he is. So, too, I was amazed to find, is Disraeli. In fact, it was most gratifying to learn that all of the great spirits consulted are very happy, and want everybody to know how happy they are. Where they are, I may say, it is all bright and beautiful.

Fear of trespassing on their time prevented me from questioning each of them up to the full limit of the period contracted for.

I understand that I have still to my credit at the agency five minutes' talk with Napoleon, available at any time, and similarly five minutes each with Franklin and Washington, to say nothing of ten minutes' unexpired time with Great-grandfather.

All of these opportunities I am willing to dispose of at a reduced rate to anyone still sceptical of the reality of the spirit world.

V. The Sorrows of a Summer Guest

Let me admit, as I start to write, that the whole thing is my own fault. I should never have come. I knew better. I have known better for years. I have known that it is sheer madness to go and pay visits in other people's houses.

Yet in a moment of insanity I have let myself in for it and here I am. There is no hope, no outlet now till the first of September when my visit is to terminate. Either that or death. I do not greatly care which.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.